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Tarawa Relieves Kearsarge in on-going HA/DR Efforts in Bangladesh

From USS Kearsarge Public Affairs

USS KEARSARGE, At Sea – The amphibious assault ship USS Tarawa (LHA 1) relieved USS Kearsarge (LHD 3) Dec. 3 in the Bay of Bengal to support on-going Humanitarian Assistance / Disaster Relief (HA/DR) efforts in Bangladesh.

Kearsarge, elements of Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) 8 and the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Special Operations Capable (SOC) turned over their responsibility for further humanitarian relief efforts to Tarawa, PHIBRON 1 and the 11th MEU (SOC) completing their support of on-going HA/DR operations.

“I am extremely proud of the entire Navy-Marine Corps team onboard Kearsarge,” said Rear Adm. Carol Pottenger, Commander, Task Force (CTF) 76, during an all-hands call. “Through your teamwork and efforts, you undoubtedly saved countless lives and gave a face to the world’s generosity and compassion.”

At the request of the Government of Bangladesh, Kearsarge Sailors and Marines brought significant air, sea and medical capabilities to the region from Nov. 23 to Dec. 3, providing aid and comfort to the victims of Tropical Cyclone Sidr.

Kearsarge and the 22nd MEU delivered over 205,000 pounds of supplies, including food, blankets, water and purification tablets, as well as over 14,000 gallons of drinking water – a critical need identified in the initial days following the storm. The water was packaged by filling over 2,400 five-gallon bags, placing them in large boxes, and loading them on pallets for lift ashore via helicopter.

“As a team, we executed an effective, efficient and, perhaps most importantly, safe operation,” said Col. Doug Stilwell, Commander, 22nd MEU (SOC). “We demonstrated just how ideal a sea-based operation is for relief efforts – capable of delivering significant relief ashore while minimizing our footprint and thereby not placing unnecessary strain on the host nation.”

Heavy and medium-lift helicopters from Kearsarge flew more than 80 sorties and 331 hours in support of the relief operations. Two medical teams additionally provided care to nearly 1,600 patients and dispensed 2,000 prescriptions from a mobile pharmacy.

“We were pleased to provide any help we could,” said Cmdr. Dave Damstra, Officer-in-Charge, Fleet Surgical Team 4. “We saw many storm related injuries: cuts, bruises, broken bones; through cooperation with local Bangladeshi hospitals, we were able to maximize medical treatment.”

Kearsarge turned the operation over to the Sailors and Marines of Tarawa, who will continue on-going operations.

“I couldn’t be more pleased with the level of thought, care and detail that has gone into planning this operation by blue-green planners and their Bangladeshi counterparts,” said Capt. Frank Ponds, Commander, Kearsarge Strike Group. “I am confident that Tarawa, and her Sailors and Marines, will be able to seamlessly pick-up where we left off.”

Kearsarge arrived on-station Nov. 22 after steaming over 3,000 miles in less than six days off the coast of Somalia. They will continue on their scheduled deployment to perform maritime security operations or other missions as required. Tarawa will continue to perform on-going HA/DR operations in support of the Government of Bangladesh.